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## Marinduque Silencescapes: History and Stories of Local Silence

Emmanuel Jayson V. Bolata

### Abstract

Details constituting the sound environments in the island province of Marinduque can be extracted and reconstructed from the H. Otley Beyer Ethnographic Collection papers written by Asunción M. Arriola, Nieves Hidalgo, Eduardo E. Palma, Serapio Rolloqui, Cornelio C. Restar, and Miguel Manguerra (1916-1928) and the writings of Rafael J. Semilla (1970-71). With these sources one will be able to examine places identified with or produced by silence, which are here called “silencescapes”. Given the challenges on defining, reading, and historicizing silences and silencescapes, there is a need to situate these places of silence within the meanings and functions in a culture and society. As a study that examines how silences produce places, it attempts to contribute to the current scholarship on geo-narratives, local history, and countermapping.

**Keywords:** silencescapes, Marinduque, geo-narratives, local history, countermapping

### Introduction

Fifty-four years apart, Asunción M. Arriola and Rafael J. Semilla portrayed with striking difference the sound environment in Marinduque during its Holy Week celebration.

Semilla described in 1970 an “exciting” soundscape. The local religious observance was dominated by the Moriones, or the Christian penitents dressed in Roman soldier attire that signifies the martyr Saint Longinus (Longhino). On Holy Wednesday, “at twelve o’clock high noon, the Morions with their full regalia appear in public in every town of Marinduque.” Such appearance was characterized with playful crowd engagement: “grunts and gestures” to scare children, “mock sword duels and general mayhem,” and *kalutang* playing, referring to a wood percussion instrument that “produces a sweet sonorous sound and yield monotonal music to the delight of the spectators.” It was only during the Maundy Thursday and Good Friday that the celebration was pronounced “solemn”. On “Holy Saturday,” the capital of the province, Boac, was “in complete carnivalistic atmosphere,” as the people enjoyed both the forthcoming resurrection of Christ and the Morion figures “frolicking” round the town. Lastly, on Easter Sunday, after the *Salubong* procession and the Misa Cantada, there would be a grand parade of the Moriones, the esteemed judges would select the prizewinners among the Morion participants, and the Pugutan play would begin with the search for Longinus, who would be beheaded “at exactly twelve o’ clock high noon.” These Easter Sunday activities were accompanied by a band “playing good melodious pieces of music for the entertainment of the spectators” (Semilla, 1970, pp. 9-31, 36-37).

Compare this with the Holy Week observance in Gasan, a town next to Boac, half a century before. Writing in 1916, Arriola paid more attention to the activities during the Sacred Paschal Triduum, the three days before Easter. During the first days of the week, people had to do all the daily activities, because the Triduum was reserved solely for acts of penitence, and on the morning of Maundy Thursday,

many people go to church. After coming from church, they do their bathing because after twelve o' clock of this day, they can no longer take their baths. In the noon of this day, the bell will ring for the last time until Saturday morning. From 12 o' clock (Tuesday) [*sic*: Thursday] no one must go out in the street with umbrellas, no one must do any physical work, except cooking. The whole town is perfectly silent. No children are allowed to play out in the street. Most people spend their time going to church uttering their long continuous prayers, reading their religious books, and singing some songs which tell the story of Jesus Christ specially about his crucifixion. At about two o'clock during this day, certain noise is made thru out the whole town; and noise indicating the capture of Jesus Christ by Judas. The whole town is very quiet; no sound of music of any kind, no singing, no dancing, except the sad moaning voice of men and women who read the "Passion" of Jesus Christ written in dialects and in poetic form. It is very sad day among our forefathers, and even the people today (Arriola, 1916a, pp. 2-3).

The differences between these two celebrations indicate the metamorphosis of a local tradition, an unfinished history of a cultural form where aural perceptions and interpretations can be situated and examined. Between Semilla's "carnivalistic" and Arriola's "perfectly silent" there lies a set of "conceptual acceptations" and "perceptual phenomena" of and on sounds and silences that are worth investigating (Martorana, 2017). This would lead us into what I call "silencescapes".

### **A Conceptual Framework on Silencescape**

A "silencescape" is a place identified with or produced by silence. Although slightly different, this definition owes inspiration to R. Murray Schafer's idea of a "soundscape" (1977, pp. 274-275). Just as how soundscapes are "marked" by unique sounds ("sound-marks") (Schafer, 1977, p. 10), silencescapes are also marked by "silence-marks". Marked by silence, a library is perhaps the quintessential example of a silencescape.

Yet, this definition of silencescapes and silence-marks has to be further validated. In defining silence, often employed is the *via negativa*: silence is the absence or lack of sound. Such resort to an antonym poses the ontological complexity of silence. Schafer asserts that the "nothingness" ascribed to silence is from a Western standpoint. Away from the Western ear, he foregrounds an Indian perception on sound: silence as the *anāhata*, meaning "unstruck sound," the highest form of sound rather than its absence (Schafer, 1977, pp. 256-262).

Riccardo Martorana (2017) argued that silence as "the state of absolute lack of sound" does not exist in nature and "is hardly achievable artificially." Thus, silence is "an abstract concept," which acceptations are tied to perceptual phenomena, and should be "considered as a perceptual experience of a human subject in relation to the sonic environment." Silence, therefore, does not necessarily connote the unheard and the unspoken. To assert the meaning and function of silence, one should examine why and how silence is distinguished, imposed, observed, and interpreted within a sonic environment. These questions would often lead us to understanding how cultures and societies operate.

Relevant here is the concept of "place," which is parallel to Schafer's spatialization of sound events, as he frequently refers to soundscapes as "sonic environment". Silencescape is a place produced by silence,

rather than a mere space where silence is produced. For Marc Augé, places are “invented,” “established,” and “symbolized”; its usage as a concept may refer at least to “an event, a myth, or a history” (pp. 43, 81-82). If we are to follow that silence is subjectively perceived, silencescape should then be recognized as a *place* rather a space, that is, subjectively constructed and construed through time by people, cultures, and societies.

Identifying silencescapes within a locality in a particular time period does not readily entail story-writing and storytelling, acts central to historical and geographical (or geo-)narratives. Primary sources may simply describe customs or rituals performed, or list what is heard. To extract stories and histories from a silencescape, its formation should be situated within weaves of meaning and function in a culture and society. It is from these specifics of “what it means” and “how it works” that stories of a place can be written and told.<sup>1</sup>

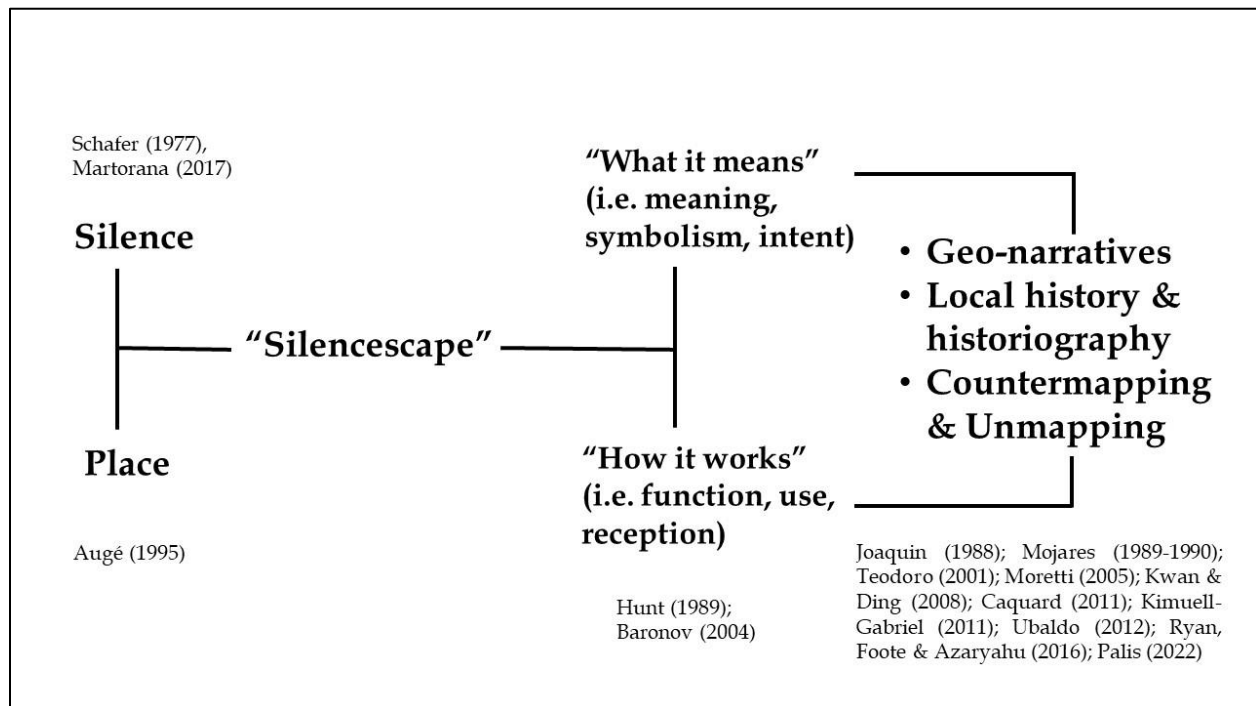


Fig. 1. A conceptual diagram on “silencescape”

In the spirit of multi-, inter-, and trans-disciplinarity, we may use the theories and practices of “geo-narratives” (Kwan & Ding, 2008) in the historical studies of places. Joseph Palis (2022, p. 700) defined “geo-narratives” as “place-writing – subjective stories that define, portray, delineate, emphasize, expand, rewrite, and imagine a place.” Moreover, some elements of “geo-narratives” and even “countermapping” advanced by contemporary geographers are already present in the local and regional history and historiography employed by historians. Historical narratives in these fields emphasize the experiences of

<sup>1</sup> Lynn Hunt (1989, p. 15), after Fredric Jameson, sees the oppositional relationship between “what it means” (unity, which also refers to meaning, symbolism, and authorial intent) and “how it works” (difference, also function, use, and reader response). David Baronov (2004, pp. 85-109), however, treats both meaning and function as related components under structuralism and functionalism.

people different, or even independent, from the grand narratives of the center, the capital, and the nation; as much as possible, these stories, affirmed through the ideological stand of language use, are by, with, and for the locals (Mojares, 1989-1990; Teodoro, 2001). Local history can be seen as a process and a product of “re-writing” and even “unwriting” (cf. “unmapping” in Palis, 2022) of a nation’s history through the differences and diversity of writing and telling about a *place*. As geographers reconsider the potential of narratives in learning and discussing spaces, local historians have long mapped places without using maps. This practice owes much to the local historians’ appreciation of oral tradition, a form that harks back to epics and poetry performed and communicated by the precolonial “history-tellers” (see “ear or aural culture” in Joaquin, 1988, pp. 4-5; cf. Kimuell-Gabriel, 2011; Ubaldo, 2012). Such stand against visualization (contrary to “time-geographic visual narratives” in Kwan & Ding, 2008; “story maps” in Caquard, 2011; and “narrative maps” in Ryan, Foote & Azaryahu, 2016) further strengthens local history’s countercartographic potential, echoed by Franco Moretti’s provocative question about literary maps: “What do they do that cannot be done with words?” (2005, p. 35).

This study contributes not only to the interrelated fields of local history, geo-narratives, and countermapping but also to the cultural history of aural perception and experiences. So far, studies on Philippine soundscapes are rather sparse (To, Chung, Vong, & Ip, 2018), focusing on the historical reconstruction of auditory encounters (Guillermo, 2022), place-sensing and making (Stallsmith, 2011; Rivera, 2014; Escano & Sumaylo, 2017), and folkloric analysis (Derain, 2021). Further, soundscape history should address its own methodological challenges, especially the lack of audio-recording technology for documenting past sounds and silences. As Schafer (1977, p. 8) commented, “We may know exactly how many new buildings went up in a given area in a decade or how the population has risen, but we do not know by how many decibels the ambient noise level may have risen for a comparable period of time. More than this, sounds may alter or disappear with scarcely a comment even from the most sensitive of historians.” With the historians’ dependence on written sources, Ramon Guillermo acknowledges the need for “a relatively rich description of experienced sound environments” (2022, p. 22) to compose a substantial history of auditory phenomena.

What more to silence? How can one “write” and “read” silence, especially in documents? John Cage, who composed the controversial piece 4’33” (1952), argued that there is no such thing as silence, even though the series of rests in his music sheet implies such (cf. Schafer 1977, p. 256; Ackerman, 1990, p. 191). Is it silence we hear when we “read” Jose Garcia Villa’s blank poem, *The Emperor’s New Sonnet*? Mojares, empirical as ever, would render silence with physicality. “A writer’s self-doubt,” for him, “are the silent spaces in a conversation” (Mojares, 1997, p. 9). “Tired with words,” wrote he, “we often say that there is nothing quite as eloquent as silence. Yet this silence, this *human* silence, is defined by its opposite, it is what we find at the outer edges of words” (1997, p. 104). What Mojares perceives as solid would be liquified in Gelacio Guillermo’s “spill of silence,” seen at the last stanza of the 1968 poem *The Beggar with a One-String Guitar* (2013, pp. 113-114).

He would not pick a gay song from the streets.

The string may break but he, his silence spilled

Into the world one foot away from him, would tie

The broken pieces once again into one wounded song.

These examples illustrate the need of reference point to read silences—it may be backgrounds on culture and history, or related (inter)texts or things. Deconstructing silence would also lead to inquiries on its socio-cultural meaning (“what it means”) and function (“how it works”). In some situations, silence is merely symbolic. In a May 4 War Remembrance ceremony in Utrecht, The Netherlands, Schafer explains what silence signifies: “As the ultimate silence is death, it achieves its highest dignity in the memorial service” (1977, pp. 254-256). However, in most cases, silence can be both meaningful and functional, which seems to affirm Fredric Jameson’s point on the inherence of “what it means” and “how it works” in language (Hunt, 1989, p. 16)—in this case, in silence and silencescapes. For Elie Wiesel (1986), silence during oppression and torment both *signifies* and *acts as* help to “the oppressor, never the victim” and encouragement to “the tormentor, never the tormented”. “To be silenced” is not only to be deprived of speech, but also of the rights and freedom that such act of speaking contains and expresses.

Writing a history of silence is a search for meanings, functions, and stories. With Marinduque as the locality being studied, I used the Marinduque papers from the H. Otley Beyer Ethnographic Collection of the National Library of the Philippines, the writings of Rafael J. Semilla, and relevant secondary sources.

### Human Silence and Supernatural Sounds

Marinduque is an island province in Southern Tagalog region composed of six towns: Boac (the capital), Gasan, Buenavista, Torrijos, Santa Cruz, and Mogpog. Most of the locals identify themselves as Tagalog and speak a Tagalog dialect called Marinduque Tagalog. The island is surrounded by other provinces housing diverse languages: Batangas, Quezon, Mindoro, Bicol, and Romblon.

The ethnographic accounts written from 1916 to 1928 and Semilla’s writings in the early 1970s contain details about Marinduque folklore, beliefs, superstitions, practices, and ways of life. Upon reading these sources, one may observe the wealth of information regarding the supernatural world and beings which the folk believed to exist. *Aswang* (*asuang*), *tiyanak* (*patianac*), *kapre* (*kaffier*), and other creatures appear in these accounts, and most of them were recognized through the sounds they produce, if not the sounds of animals that would warn people about their presence (Hidalgo, 1917, p. 4; Rolloqui, 1924, p. 11; Restar, 1924, p. 6; Semilla, 1970, p. 45-46; 1971, p. 39).

It is in this context of supernatural soundscape where human silence can be located. Places, after all, are not only defined by human subjectivities but can also be “inhabited by the supernatural, by a complex order of souls and spirits... that reminds [humans] that there are greater powers than [them] that inhabit and influence [their] environment” (Mojares, 2015, p. 144). In 1917, Nieves Hidalgo wrote about the need to be quiet when passing through the woods at night. “Old people in walking through the woods at night, do not allow the young people to talk but instead made them pray. They believed that if they talk they might awake some of the mischievous spirits of the woods and thus become the object of their play; while if they prayed these spirits even though they have had intentions would be prevented from doing so” (p. 6).

Here, sounds conjure beings, while silence perpetuates invisibility. If making sounds interrupts the order of things, being silent interrupts such interruption. Through silence one might be able to hear supernatural sounds and act for one’s safety. It is functional rather than merely symbolic, since, as Derain notes, listening becomes a matter of life and death (2021, pp. 34-35). Vigilance is implied in Semilla’s remark:

"At night the natives could hear weird enchanting sounds and could see flickering malignant light" (1971, p. 38).

It is followed by Hidalgo's discussion on the *bulong* ("whisper"). "These mischievous spirits are called, 'bulong'. If a person becomes object of the fun of the 'bulong' a momentary malady, that causes one to lose his knowledge of the right direction thus causing him to wander away from the place where he is going, comes to him. However, if, as soon as he perceives that he has the 'bulong', he turns his clothes wrong side out, then he sees again his way and easily arrives home or to the place where he was going. The clothes are turned wrong side because they believe that 'bulong', which leads them astray, is inside the clothing and if this was not taken off and then turned out, the spirit would remain with the person and carry him away to their dark abode in the caves."

Perhaps, silence mediates the "hearing" of the *bulong*. One must be "more silent" than the soft-sounding *bulong* so that it can be heard and recognized. Moreover, *bulong* is defined by Semilla (1971, p. 40) as a "sort of prayer" which can make someone "immune from danger of any kind." These meanings of *bulong* construct an aural battlefield, wherein either side move towards the absence of sounds. *Bulong* as either malevolent spirit or protective invocation is also connected to *ginhawa*, *balis*, and *gahoy*, which interrelate well-being, sickness, breath, and speech.

Modernity marks the divide between meaning and function in human silence and supernatural sounds. The modern rejection of anything superstitious and unscientific reduces the necessary obedience to aural codes of conduct into mere knowledge of what sounds mean. Thus, being silent in the woods at night ceases to be a life-saving recourse, since the *bulong* exists outside the realm of science.

Furthermore, these acts of knowledge production, of compiling superstitions and beliefs, may function as a "progressive disenchantment" (Aguilar, 2013, p. 298) of tradition and beliefs, situated within the American imperialist project in the Philippines. It can be seen on how some writers framed these local beliefs. "All I have described above is still done in many barrios in Marinduque," wrote Arriola as she ends her paper on "primitive beliefs regarding death". "However, the superstitions are decreasing in number. They are coming to practice doing more sensible and personable things" (1916b, p. 9). Observe how Miguel Manguerra (1928, p. 1), in his paper on customs and habits he labelled "peculiar," positions the American colonial legacy against the "conservatism" of the "uneducated mass".

With the coming of the Americans, and the introduction of a liberal education to the masses, a social change may be said to have taken place. The products of the public schools, reared in an atmosphere of democracy, cannot help but regard with indifference and askance the old customs and habits which are still dear to the hearts of the old folks. The uneducated mass of the people are still very conservative in their ideas, and are greatly influenced by superstitious beliefs.

### **Silences in Farming and Fishing**

Manguerra in 1928 (pp. 7-8) recorded a pre-harvest ritual. "When the rice are already ripe and ready for harvesting the first thing to be done is for some old man, to go to the field before the sun rises, and cut some stalks of the rice and place them in a basket which he carries with him. When the basket is already filled, he then puts it on his shoulder and keeping himself very silent, proceeds direct to the store-house

for rice, with head bent downward. He very carefully enters the store-house and after whispering some prayers, he places the rice on the floor at a corner of the house or 'kamalig'. This ceremony is done when there is full moon and when the tide of the sea is high. A cross is usually placed with the rice, before new stocks are added."

A survey of harvest rituals in Romblon, Central Panay, Bohol, Bukidnon, Cagayan de Oro City, and Compostela and among the Kalinga, the B'laan, and the Jama Mapun identifies several common features: 1) an old person performing the ceremony alone, 2) communication to spirits through prayers and offerings, either to express gratitude or to appease; and 3) silence or the absence of any speech or conversation aside from solemn prayers (Demetrio, 1991b, pp. 533-537). F. Landa Jocano recorded that in Central Panay, after planting a bundle of *tigbaw* (*Saccharum spontaneum*), "[f]acing east, the farmer shouts that he is placing the markers as a sign that if anyone trespasses and dies, he is not responsible. Then he goes home in silence, retracing his footsteps and avoiding people. At home, he takes his bamboo basket and returns to the field. He cuts seven stalks of the ripening rice, places them beside the basket, bites his harvesting knife, picks up the rice stalks again and ties them into a bundle. All the while he mutters his prayers. When the ritual basket is full, the farmer leaves the field. A safe harvest is now ensured" (Demetrio, 1991b, 534). Lourdes Taga-Gonzales described a corn harvest ritual in Bohol: "Before [the farmer] picks the ears from the stalk and places them in a secure place, he prays one 'Our Father,' one 'Hail Mary,' and the 'Credo' without turning his back. Neither does he speak a word to other people around him. He takes the ears of corn and places them in a secure place" (Demetrio, 1991a, p. 141). Edward Dozier described some taboos among the Kalinga: "After the initial ritualistic gathering (*inapulan*), all harvesters join in to help. No conversation, no singing, no whistling, shouting or laughing is permitted until the plot is half-harvested" (Demetrio, 1991a, p. 141).

Silence seems to be a medium through which the ritual performers or the community may thank and appease the spirits. Further, as Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr. (2013, pp. 301-302) argues, the "antisocial practice" (i.e. avoiding people; proceeding directly to the granary) implies "a sign of respect accorded to the spirits, allowing them to 'have' the rice before humans partake it," since the precolonial Filipinos' "magical worldview suggested that spirits resides in the grains of rice." Silence, therefore, not only acts as a medium of spiritual communication, but also a cancellation of any human interaction via speech. Breaking this silence is a taboo, and one should expect harm or damage to be caused by angry spirits in whatever form (cf. *gaba*, in Demetrio, 1991b, p. 536; illness, in Aguilar, 2013, p. 302).

Some fishing practices involved soundlessness, too. Silence is useful for fishermen's focus, especially in observing underwater flows, watching possible catch, and waiting for line tug (cf. Sikat, 1993; J. Soberano, 2022). Eduardo E. Palma (1917, pp. 6-7) discussed poison fishing in Santa Cruz. It uses *tuba* (croton tiglium: *Tigilium officinale* Klotz.), *bayate* or *lagtang* (fish berry: *Anamirta jucunda* Miers.), and the roots of *tibalao* (poison vine: *Galedupa elliptica* Roxb.) and *tubli* (also poison vine: *Derris elliptica* (Wall.) Benth., *Milletia splendidissima* Vidal). The *tuba* fruit, mixed with earth and wood ashes, is fermented over night before using. *Bayate* is pounded with crabs and ashes until it turns into powder. The sap of *tibalao* and *tubli* roots are known to make fishes "helpless" whenever they "smell" it. In poison fishing, Palma (1917, p. 9) recorded a "superstition" that involves silence.

After the poison has been thrown into the water and its effect felt by the fishes the fisherman should keep absolute quiet, and should abstain from pointing with the finger or stick the dying creature before the shole operation is completed. If any one should exclaim any word



of surprise in seeing the disorder and confusion among the fishes, the effect of the poison will be counteracted and the dying fishes will recover.

It was believed in Batobato, Bohol and Malaybalay, Bukidnon that noise would drive the fish away. An informant from Mambajao, Camiguin said that a fisherman “must not say anything” when he is fishing in the middle of the sea, because the weather would turn bad (Demetrio 1991a, p. 119). The writer Rogelio Sikat (1993, p. 44) mentioned in his diary that he and his Tatang (father) were both quiet when fishing, for the fear of “being heard” by the fishes.

Brad Madrilejos (2022), a student of philosophy from Romblon, shared in a personal conversation his insight about such silence. “At least according to the fishing practices here in Romblon, it is taboo to talk or make noise during fishing because the fish can supposedly hear the noise and therefore become wary of the fisher’s presence. Talking drives away any prospective catch... Although in my own experience this taboo is not rigidly followed given how fisherfolks in different boats talk to each other in order to determine which fishing spot offers more catch, if the current is stronger in deeper waters, etc. I think this adds an interesting inflection to the conception of the ocean as an aporetic space, as an ‘endless realm of pure movement’: this vastness that reveals the boats’ presence is seen by these fisherfolk as a danger to be evaded through silence and the erasure of aural traces, not because the sea mutes all sound but precisely because it is a vector that facilitates the transmission of sound. In a way, the sea’s aporia— at least according to the logic of these fisherfolk— comes about more as norm and less as nature; the sea is not a liquid sonic impasse but a porous— and pouring— aural amplifier.”

According to Ocean Conservation Research (2018), fishes detect sounds through their cilia (nerve hairs) located at the lateral line, swim bladders, ossicles (ear bones), and otoliths (skull bones). In shallow water, fishes might hear human voices or mechanical noise. However, marine soundscapes involve sound production and perception that are different from the way humans do. It contains other aquatic “sounds” and “noises,” making it difficult for deep-water fishes to detect above-water sounds. Nonetheless, this perception on “fishes’ way of hearing” banks on both the recognition of auditory capacities of the more-than-human and the anthropocentric view over animal sound perception.

### **Silence in Mourning Human and Divine Deaths**

Silence is also mandated during times of death. According to Arriola (1916b):

While the baby is dying all the members of the family come near him, but must not cry loud otherwise, he will suffer, for his angel guard will not take him unless every body in the house is perfectly quiet (p. 2).

If the father dies his body is kept in his own home mourned by his family for twenty-four hours [...] During the evening the house is very quiet; no music, no loud laughter, no loud talking; nothing is heard but the deep sighin [sic] and sad weeping voices of the family and friends. Sometime[s] they read Pasion of Christ, just to keep them awake (p. 5).

The age and social status of the deceased come with the kind of practices being performed. “If the deceased is not yet seven years old,” said Arriola, “the family does not mourn for him. Instead they kill pig, chicken, catch fish and pound rice and have a big festival” (1916b, p. 2). “The death and funerals of

older people, that is above seven years of age,” Arriola continued, “are celebrated [*sic*] and performed [with] more solemnity and have more superstitious beliefs connected with it, than those of the young children” (p. 4). Silence is perceived in reference to age: the older the person, the “more solemn” the practice gets. Serious grieving for the dead father often reflects social importance, not too different from “mournful silence” accorded by precolonial Visayans to a *datu*’s death (Scott, 1994, pp. 91-92).

During the wake for a seven-year-old, “young ladies and young men are dancing (usually the native Filipino dance)” as others cook and prepare the table. “To have this dance they use guitar. The people in the house do not sleep the whole evening. In the midst of the night they take some refreshments, sometimes coffee, tuba, bananas, either fried or boiled, some cakes or ‘suman’”. In mourning an old person, only “deep sighing,” “sad weeping,” and “reading of the Passion” can be heard. As people bring the dead to the church and to the cemetery, as they place the body into the grave, as they kiss the hand as a sign of goodbye, “all these are being done very solemnly... accompanied with weeping and sad sighing” (Arriola 1916b, pp. 2-6). Being awake in a wake is grounded in the belief that witches or aswangs might steal the corpse. Restar (1924, p. 5) noted, “if a dead body is not carefully watched it would be carried away and be changed with the body of a banana plant.” Serapio Rolloqui locates where the aswang would stay: “When in a certain house there is a dead person, an ‘asuang’ usually sits at the top of the roof where it makes a small hole by means of which the dead is constantly watched by the creature” (1924a, pp. 11-12).

Mourning recognizes the void brought about by an old person’s death. However, expression of void through silence is not only conveyed for human deaths, but also finds its epitome in the death of the Christian Lord. “When God dies,” said Mojares (1997, p. 250), “it is not just this field, or street, or town He vacates, He is absent everywhere. What emptiness could be more empty than a world emptied of God.” That’s why, wrote Arriola (1916b, p. 3), “This celebration [of a seven-year-old child’s death] is never done however during the last part of February ended with the Holy Week in March. During this time they read what we call in Tagalog ‘Passion ni Cristo,’ mean[ing] ‘Suffering of Christ,’ where in the crucifixion of Jesus is discussed.” Quite contrary to Mojares, Jose Garcia Villa’s poetic register further deepened the aural meaning of divine death through distinguishing “silence” from “silentness”. A statement cut into lines, poem 84 of *Divine Poems in Have Come, Am Here* (1993, p. 65) argues that even in His death, God fills the human soul.

Silentness is not Silence.

He’s silent in silence whose

Soul’s geography is bare.

But silentness is deportment

Heroic, when the field is

Occupied. He’s silent in

Silentness—whose God is there,

Or when God lies dying,

A finger to His lips. *Hush!*

Prompted in this paper's introduction, the contradiction between the "solemn" (Arriola, 1916a) and the "festive" (Semilla, 1970) in the Marinduqueñan Semana Santa is a "local evidence" of what Mojares calls as the "tension between Carnival and Lent". In Cebu, he described the "decline of piety" and the "diminishing old observances" such as "the total silence that reigned over the city," profaned by people who were "making noise, going out on the streets, and forgetting that it was a time of penance and soul-searching" (Mojares, 1997, pp. 59-60). Akin to mourning a dead father, silence expresses the spiritual vacuum carved out of Christ's death. Sounds would only take the form of "loud prayers in sad and moanful tunes" (Arriola, 1916a, p. 5). It was only after the triumph of Life over Death that the "joyful" and "festive" atmosphere would commence: the priest announces in the Saturday mass that "Jesus has risen from the dead," and "this word will be followed at once by loud happy voices and music with tolling of bells for about ten minutes" (Arriola, 1916a, p. 7). "They now can do some of their works, take their baths, go out somewhere, play some music and sing some lively happy songs." With the return of Life, people would also return to their normal, everyday life.

Remarkably, Arriola had no mention of the religious practice that rendered Marinduque as the "Lenten Capital of the Philippines"—the Moriones, a rite-turned-festival that honors the martyrdom of Saint Longinus. This community performance that involves penitents wearing Roman soldier attire culminates in the play called *Pugutan* ("beheading"), wherein the one who takes the role of Longinus would be theatrically "beheaded"—a combined helmet (*turbante*) and mask held by the executioner at the end would act as Longinus' "severed head" (*pugot na ulo*). Although scant in historical evidence, tradition says that this masked devotion originated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, pioneered by the native priest Dionisio Santiago to encourage local conversion and edification of faith (Oliverio, 2020). It is in this context of popular devotion that the gradual metamorphosis of the Marinduqueñan Holy Week sound environment can be historicized.

In 1961, Alfredo R. Roces (1961, pp. 258-259) noticed the Moriones' merry entertainment, culminating with the "sweeping flood of color and sound" on Easter Sunday. "Although the *moriones* are supposed to represent the Roman soldiers and Temple guards of Jerusalem, they do not keep very strictly to these roles. They will perform folk dances upon request, or serenade the ladies. They play pranks on their more sober fellow townsmen and frighten the children. They wander through the streets striking their cylindrical sticks (*kalutang*) together and producing a rhythmic, musical tinkling." Through the promotion of the Moriones by the national-level officials like President Diosdado Macapagal and Education Secretary Alejandro R. Roces in 1960s (Wendt, 2016, p. 114), this barrio-based tradition of the common folk transformed into an elite, población-centered "festival" catered mostly for tourists, visitors, and semi-urban penitents (Peterson, 2016). Thus, Semilla in 1970-71 would speak more about the Morion figure along with festive noise and "ejaculatory cries of merriment" (1971, p. 23), far different from Arriola's dead God and total silence in 1916. Liwayway Mendoza affirmed such soundly spectacle in an observance not later than 1974: "For seven days they [Moriones] go around the island's towns, playing hilarious pranks and making *kalutang* music, accompanied by brass bands. When addressed, they disguise their identities by speaking in high falsetto voices and uttering bird-like sounds... Beginning Holy Monday, the streets become alive with the spirit of celebration... By Holy Thursday, the colorful moriones are all over the town. They call on residents, singing songs and playing musical instruments" (1977, pp. 30-31).

The appearance of the Moriones in the población erased the accustomed “reign of silence”. Furthermore, enmeshed within the culture-based tourism of President Ferdinand Marcos’ regime, local politicians have co-opted these religious expressions. In the 1970s, the late ex-governor Carmencita Reyes heavily modified the *Pugutan*, which was originally a spontaneous “community theater” enacted after the Easter *Salubong* (De la Paz, 2000). By shaping it into a scripted, Senakulo-like stage performance scheduled on Saturday evening, it was then too different for the local eye that a Marinduqueño commented: “When we’re celebrating, God’s still dead” (Peterson, 2016, p. 92). Thus, the redefined, postcolonial Morion brings with him not only a new cultural form and identity but also an altered soundscape of faith.

This narrative of cultural transformation results to the centralization of Longinus, the figure represented by the Moriones, over the mourning of Christ’s death and celebration of His resurrection. Reinhard Wendt (2016, p. 114) observes, “The soldiers moved more and more to the center of the ceremonies in the Holy Week and became the Moriones festival’s more important feature. Thus, the character of the festival was altered in a profound way. It became more professional, commercialized, and staged to attract visitors.” Such tradition had a history of Hollywoodization, promotion of cultural tourism, and intervention of political forces, which were often suited for the consumption of the local, national, and foreign elite, and in the long run, for the continuity of political power (Peterson, 2016). “[A]s the country moved into the Marcos years (1965-1986),” wrote Peterson (2016, pp. 83-84), “local politicians increasingly placed many popular performance forms under their patronage and sometimes their direct control.” Along with these confluences not only of persistent cultural forms but also of political and economic forces are the transformation of sound perception ideologies, and of the aural places themselves. Different from Derain’s sole articulation of “silence” as erasure by power in the context of aswang soundscape (2021, pp. 32-33), in this aural history of Marinduqueñan Holy Week we see how sounds erased traditions of silence. A silencing of silence by its inverse—making sounds.

### A Detour to Words

If we are to agree that “music is language” (Ackerman, 1990, pp. 209-216), what lacks in these stories and discussion is the appraisal of aural concepts articulated in local speech. Given the language of the primary sources, the silence-marks are all registered in English: “silence/silent,” “solemnity/solemn/solemnly,” “quiet,” “stillness,” “solitude,” “nothing is/was heard,” “no music,” no “talk,” “no loud talking,” “no loud laughter,” “not loud,” “no [birds] sing,” and “without any conversation.” This necessitates a detour to words, which explain local worldviews on sounds and silences.

Unlike Schafer’s reduction of sonic perceptions into Western and Non-Western, Diane Ackerman (1990, p. 175), by returning to the words themselves, redefines linguistic boundaries of aural experiences. “In Arabic, absurdity is not being able to hear. A ‘surd’ is a mathematical impossibility, the core of the word ‘absurdity,’ which we get from the Latin *surdus*, ‘deaf or mute,’ which is a translation from the Arabis *jadr asamm*, a ‘deaf root,’ which in turn is a translation from Greek *alogos*, ‘speechless or irrational.’” The word “sound” itself has a Proto-Indo-European root *\*swen-*, which can be observed in Sanskrit (*svanati*, *svanah*), Latin (*sonus*, *sonare*), Old Irish (*senim*), Old English (*geswin*, *swinsian*, *swan*), and Old Norse (*svanr*). “Silence,” however, originates from *silere* (“be quiet or still”) that later appeared in Latin (*silens*, *silentium*) and Old French (*silence*) (Harper, 2022).

Words from Philippine languages have a rather different semantic field. It appears that words on sound and voice originate from the root *\*-neR* (“hear”). It can be seen in the Subanen/Subanun *bonug* (“to hear”), Aborlan Tagbanwa *geneg* (“hear, listen”), Tagalog *kinig* (“listen to someone, or a sound”), Cebuano *lánug* (“loud, resonant, echo”), Manobo (Western Bukidnon) *dineg* (“hear”) and *pemineg* (“listen to something, obey”), and Maranao *kaneg* (“sense of hearing, hear”) and *neg* (“hear, hearing”).<sup>2</sup>

The Proto-Western Malayo-Polynesian word *\*teneR* both denotes sound and voice, as observed in Casiguran Dumagat *tənog* (“noise, rattle; to rattle, to purr, to roar, to make a noise, to thump”), Sambal (Botolan) *tonóy* (“noise or sound”), Tagalog *tínig* (“voice”) and *tunog* (“sound”), Bikol *tanóg* (“sound, noise”) and *tingog* (“voice”), Hanunóo *tunúg* (“sound”), Cebuano *tunúg* (“sound of a musical instrument; resonant, producing a distantly loud sound; widely known; be distinctly audible”) and *tíngug* (“sound, voice”), Yakan *tennug* (“hollow sounding, loud sounding, of brass gongs”), Isneg *tannúg* (“sound of musical instruments”), Agutaynen *tonog* (“the sound of a radio, musical instrument, engine, a person’s whistle, etc.”), Palawan Batak *tánar* (“voice”), and Tausug *tanug* (“the volume of a sound or voice”). There are other words for sound such as the Ilokano *uni*, *timek*, and *ringgor*.<sup>3</sup>

When it comes to silence, words are more varied. To choose a few, Ilokano has *ulimek*, *kinaulimek*, and *panagulimek* not only for “silence,” but also for “quiet, calm, peaceful, tranquil, serene”. Negation of sounds through *awan* (“nothing, without”) is observed in words for “soundless” (*awanan-timek*, *awanan-ringgor*, *awanan-uni*; synonymous to the non-negative *naulimek*) and “soundlessness” (*kinaawan-uni*, *kinaawan-ringgor*). *Linóng* in Hiligaynon is not only “quietude” but also “peace, tranquillity, calm, calmness”; *kalinóng* refers to the noun while *malinóng* the adjective. It appears in Hiligaynon, with other words like *táwhay*, *dáit/daet*, and *húsay*, that silence is related to calm, peace, order, harmony, concord, and good social relations. The Cebuano *hilum* means silent, quiet, secret, and covert; *kahilum* is silence; *hilumun* and *mahilumun* is not to talk. Waray has *mamingaw* for “quiet and silent,” connected to the Cebuano *mingaw* that denotes loneliness, homesickness, and being left out. Silence in Bikol is *tunínong*; a period of silence in conversation is *báyaw*; to be silent on certain matters is *rírong*; and someone who does not talk much is a *giróng*, *púnok*, or *hálo*. Some languages, like Tagalog, Ilokano, and Bikol, also borrowed the Spanish *silencio*, written as *silensiyo* or *silensio*.<sup>4</sup>

In Tagalog, which the Marinduque people speaks, there is *tahimik* (“silent”), that can be turned into a noun by adding affixes *ka-* and *-an*, thus *katahimikan* (“silence”).<sup>5</sup> Further, in an attempt not only to confirm if what the sources tell is indeed a “history of the present” but also to recenter the local language, this paper ends with a conversation.

## A Conversation in Lieu of Conclusion

One sunny morning of January 2022, we interviewed Javier Soberano, a 79-year-old fisherman from Bognuyan, Gasan. At his house overlooking the sea between Marinduque and Mindoro, Lolo Ambey told

<sup>2</sup> Blust & Trussell, 2010 (*\*-neR*: [https://www.trussell2.com/acd/acd-r\\_n1.htm?zoom\\_highlight=%2A-neR](https://www.trussell2.com/acd/acd-r_n1.htm?zoom_highlight=%2A-neR))

<sup>3</sup> Blust & Trussell, 2010 (*\*teneR*: [https://www.trussell2.com/acd/acd-s\\_t.htm#10367](https://www.trussell2.com/acd/acd-s_t.htm#10367)); Agcaoili, 2011, p. 797; Mintz & Britanico, 1985, pp. 184, 206; Wolff, 1972.

<sup>4</sup> Agcaoili, 2011, pp. 781-782, 797; Wolff, 1972; Mintz & Britanico, p. 180; Santos, 2006, p. 599; Philippine Languages (2015): Ilokano, Cebuano, and Hiligaynon sections.

<sup>5</sup> Santos, 2006, p. 599.

us about his childhood experience that involved silence. “Tangis ako nung bata pa raw. Sabi nung Tatay ay, napigilan daw ako’t nandyan ang Hapon... Nagalakad yung mga Hapon, nagabahay-bahay. Syempre takot ka. Ano na yuon.”<sup>6</sup>

I tried to ask about what I read from the papers. Yet most of the time it was either he has not heard about it, or his story would flow to another. He shared his uncle’s extraordinary tale during the Second World War. Luciano Nambio and his companion were captured by the Japanese. The soldiers stabbed them with bayonets. His companion died. To avoid further injury, Luciano chose to play dead. Soldiers gone, he crawled away to flee. He explained that Luciano survived because he had an *agimat* called *sa-tubig*. Associated with liquid properties, its power is to make one’s body impervious to physical harm.

Lolo Ambey believes in the Santelmo, the souls of those who died in the waters. He said that he himself saw it once. The Santelmo loves to scare fishermen by making their catch disappear, but by ignoring it, fishermen would get their fish back or would even have more. More frightened than Lolo Ambey, my aunt Irene described it as a scary person with flaming head that walks on water. The old man mentioned an anting-anting for fishing. *Tiwtiw* can be any object that appears in the middle of colliding river flows. At the seashore (*tabihan*), by pointing the tiwtiw on the water, heaps (*timbon*) of fishes would come to get the amulet. “Dito lang sa tabihan. Pag sa laot ay baka lubog ang bangka mo nun... Magasampahan ang isda sa iyo nun ay,”<sup>7</sup> he laughingly replied to my question if one could show the tiwtiw in the middle of the sea.

However, despite believing in the Santelmo and the anting-anting, Lolo Ambey disproves that fish can hear human sounds. Between mishearing and repetition, we would see concerns beyond the strict binary of sounds and silences; it was rather the unconstrained amalgam of imagination and experiences, inviting us to recognize the ever-shifting boundaries of folk narratives and folk knowledge, of local stories and local science. Synonymous to wisdom, the “lore” in the “folklore” may best summarize such poetic and epistemic fusion.

Javier Soberano [JS]: Oo. Minsan ngani kami’y nagahapin nun ay, wag ka anya magasamuk ka, maganon sa akin yung tatay ko— (Yes. Once we were fishing by *hapin*, don’t be noisy, my father would tell me—)

EJ Bolata [EB]: Maga-ano po? (Be what?)

Marilyn Bolata [MB]: Magasamuk. (Be noisy.)

JS: Magasamuk. (Be noisy.)

EB: Samuk?<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> I was a cry-baby back then. Motioned my father [gestured to cover his mouth], stopping me [to cry] because the Japanese soldiers were already there... the Japanese walked, going from one house to another. Of course, you’re scared. What a life!

<sup>7</sup> Only here at the shore. If you’re at the middle of the sea, your boat might capsize [because] fishes would jump on board.

<sup>8</sup> Brad Madrilejos (online communication, February 18, 2022): [S]amuk in [R]omblomanon can both mean sonic and spatial cluttering. A marketplace can be kasamuk because it’s noisy but it is also kasamok because it’s cluttered and disorganized.

MB: Yung nagaingay, samuk. (That being noisy, *samuk*.)

JS: Nagaingay. [laughs] Wag daw magaingay— (Being noisy. He said don't be noisy—)

EB: Bakit daw po? (Why?)

JS: Mawawala yung sibad. (The catch would disappear.)

MB: Ah, ganon po baga yun? (Ah, is that the way things are?)

JS: Parang nakwan ngani, pama— (Seems a [superstition]—)

MB: Nagugulat siguro pag nagasalita ay naririnig— (The fish seems to be frightened; they would hear it when one speaks—)

JS: Hinde, yun ay parang pamahiin laang. Di man mapapakinggan ng isda yun dun sa ilalim! [laughs] (No, it was just a superstition. The fish under won't hear it!)

EB: [Laughs] Pero nasubukan nyo na po na kahit maingay ay may nahuli po kayo? (But have you tried catching fish while it was noisy?)

JS: Oo. Sarian ngani. (Yes. It really depends.)

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